

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. 2 Corinthians 5:19

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HONEST TO GOD

By Gordon Bals

HOW HONEST are you with God? How much of yourself do you give directly to God? Do you believe what David said, "We can pour our heart out to God at all times," (Psalm 62)? It seems to me we often act like we can only bring God the good parts of our heart. Unfortunately, this fuels indifference towards God because when we don't think He can handle all the mixed up stuff inside of us we shrink away from a deeper intimacy with Him. In the Problem of Pain C.S. Lewis notes that God exhibits a 'divine humility' when he accepts us even though we come to him because nothing else worked. He says, "I call this a divine humility because it is a poor thing to strike our colours to God when the ship is going down under us; a poor thing to come to Him as a last resort, to offer up 'our own' when it is no longer worth keeping. If God were proud He would hardly have us on such terms: but He is not proud. He stoops to conquer, He will have us even though we have shown that we prefer everything else to Him and come to Him because there is 'nothing better' now to be had."

In this newsletter I want to add to Lewis' view of divine humility by taking it a step further. God is not only humble enough to welcome us when we turn to him out of pain *he is humble enough to let us complain to him and accuse Him of not caring about us in the midst of difficult circumstances.* Our pride in these situations affects us in two ways. First, we can't imagine someone humble enough to accept our questions or complaints regarding the 'rightness' of their care. As humans, we are used to authority demanding our affirmation and acceptance and we can't imagine an authority kind enough to help us as we question the quality of their care. In addition, we

think we should be better than we are. We believe that we should be good enough to respond with admirable submission to whatever the Lord asks as to walk through.

We are not noble enough to always respond well to the things the Lord asks us to endure hear on earth. In fact, the redemptive part of difficult circumstances is that they will drive us deeper into the Lord by arousing our doubts, questions and unbelief so that we can see our need for a deeper faith. This theme is underscored in the book of Hebrews. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by

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it," (Hebrews 12:11). If we don't 'enjoy' or robotically submit to God's discipline He is kind enough to let us stumble through difficulty while waiting for us to embrace a future change he can foresee. I would say God's grace is often piercing our hearts most significantly when we are questioning Him through thorny periods He knows will be redemptive. In such moments, when we cast our doubt, defiance, pride, or resentment upon God and He accepts it and still loves us, hardness can be chipped away from our hearts that we will see at a later date.

Biblically, this way of relating to God is called lamenting. There are a variety of Biblical illustrations of lamenting. David and Job are the two most prominent examples but among others Abraham, Moses and Jesus all questioned God.

David, who was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14), often voiced complaints and accusations to the Lord. Among many of his laments David said, "O Lord, why do you reject me? Why do you turn your face from me?" (Psalm 88:14). God said that Job, who lobbied many criticisms at Him, "Did not sin in what he said," (Job 42:7-8).

Lamenting is not grumbling. A grumbler is indifferent or hard towards God and has built a defensive fortress around his heart by ignoring pain, doubt and resentment instead of moving through them with the Lord's help. *A lamenter remains receptive to God but confused about life which causes him to search out God and wrestle with Him.*

A lamenter feels the same things as a grumbler but keeps bringing them to God and is stumbling towards the truth with openness to God's capacity to redeem any human incident. Lamenting is bringing our humanity to God. It is questioning Him, complaining to Him and emptying our fleshly nature upon Him. Lamenting is an essential part of surrendering to God and turning over our sin to him.

There are many ways lamenting helps us and I will illuminate several of them here. First, as we begin to practice it we recognize more clearly that ultimately all our sin is against God. Our fleshly nature is hostile towards God. It continually whispers to us that God is holding out on us. Take for instance, a woman who compulsively cleans. In painful moments she hears her flesh say God doesn't care about the chaos in her world so she has to expend her own energy to feel better. A simple way for her to do this is through organizing and cleaning the space around her. Of course, a cleaner,

neater environment brings her temporary relief. As she becomes attached to that she begins to trust her efforts more than the Lord and doesn't see or feel the anger in her attempts to maintain a neater, cleaner home. It feels like life to her and it doesn't feel like a swat at God. But in her efforts she is saying to God, "You don't care enough to protect my space so I have to stay on top of things. I have to make up for your lack." Her husband and children feel the anger and sin in her posture but she is oblivious to it and just thinks she works harder and is more disciplined than those around her.

If this woman could begin to recognize the lies of her flesh that has turned her against trust in God's care she would meaningfully change. I would suggest that the next time she felt some angst, that instead of coming down on her children to cooperate with her attachment to order, she should pray this prayer, "God I am sick of the chaos in this world. I abhor the fact that you don't cooperate with my desires for more rest and order. I am mad at you! You seem indifferent to my plight so I have to work harder and stay on top of my family more." As she continued to pray similar prayers (even if they felt awkward) over time she would see how much she has fed into her flesh and enflamed a hostility towards God. Her self-deception, that her actions are only an attempt to keep a clean home and are not fueled by some anger at God, keeps her locked in anger. As she begins to pray this anger to God she becomes more aware of feeding into her flesh that hates God and it uncovers the deep foolishness in her actions (that a clean, orderly home is the basis for rest).

Our flesh wants to foolishly battle with God. Lamenting is saying directly to God that we don't think He cares about us instead of saying it indirectly through 'covert' sin like gossip, checking out in front of the TV or unnecessary eating, working, or exercising. Thus, lamenting helps uncover the

way we follow our flesh into picking a fight with God by believing or doing things that are against Him. Praying the contents of our flesh brings us closer to seeing how our sin begins and ends with an inane hostility towards God.

I have already alluded to the second advantage to lamenting. It makes us kinder people. This is one of the lessons in the book of Job. In a very short period Job loses all his oxen, donkeys, sheep, shepherds, farmhands and all his sons and daughters. When his friends heard all that Job had suffered they went to console him and, "Sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. And no one said a word, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words" (2:13). For a week they were good friends. After this period Job feels safe enough to voice his disorientation towards God and then his friends go from good friends to bad friends. They begin to direct Job to focus on 'the here and now' and turn him away from his

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relationship with God. Job knows better. Intrinsically, Job knows his fight is not against flesh and blood and he knows only a touch from God will reorient him to a holy frame of mind. He keeps telling his friends his case is with God and this focus helps him to be kinder to his friends. Among the harsh comments from his friends Zophar declares, "Should I remain silent while you babble on? When you mock God, shouldn't someone make you ashamed? Listen! God is doubtless punishing you far less than you deserve," (11:3,6B).

Given the immensity of Job's loss (and his righteous integrity that God affirms in the beginning of the book) I am surprised that Job doesn't tear his friends to shreds. Hear the pained kindness in the way Job ad-

resses his friends, "I could say the same things if you were in my place. I could spout off my criticisms against you and shake my head at you. But that's not what I would do. I would speak in a way that helps you. I would try to take away your grief. But as it is, my grief remains no matter how I defend myself. And it does not help if I refuse to speak," (16:4-6). Job is kinder towards his friends because he is wrestling out much of his angst in relationship with God. If you were to read the book of Job narratively you would recognize how a vast majority of the tension between Job and his friends is Job's sense that he can complain freely to God. In his distress Job kept going to God which helped him be kinder to his friends even in their harshness.

When we go through real difficulty it is a fight to maintain a Godward focus, and through Job we can recognize how this helps us to be more kind to others. In addition, if we have the heart to pour our anguish out towards God and wait for Him to answer then when He speaks we will experience a deeper surrender. Let's say instead of angrily cleaning the house and tearing your family apart or passionately engaging in exercise or sexual indulgence you take your frustrations out to God. You do what Job did for days and nights.

You complain freely to the Lord. Then when He speaks you will relinquish more of your sinful flesh. When we act out our sin on our family or ourselves we don't surrender as deeply and meaningfully to the Lord. The shame from 'horizontal sin' (against ourselves and others) shuts us down and turns us away from the face of God. That shame is like static on the phone that clouds the voice of God. If however, we move towards God with these passions and bring them to Him, He lifts our countenance and helps us to see Him more clearly.

God already knows everything that is in our heart and He would prefer that we not pretend with Him. In fact, I believe Jesus' death means most when we actually sin against God in the way

we relate to Him. When we bring our doubt, accusations and resentment to Him and have the courage to express such sentiments right to Him it is at those moments that Jesus' death becomes more meaningful. As God responds with strength and kindness to our unbelief, sin is more meaningfully dislodged. Listen to Job's response when God finally shows up and speaks to Him. "I am nothing – how could I ever find the answers? I will put my hand over my mouth in silence. I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say," (40:3-5). There is a beautiful and profound silence in Job's heart. The words of the Lord pierced him and he

had nothing left to speak. Part of Job's stillness comes from hearing God clearly. He took his complaints directly to God and did not act them out as much on himself or others so when God finally speaks Job's countenance is set on God and he hears Him directly.

When we give more of ourselves in relationship with the Lord (even if that is the worst parts about us) we will taste more of Him. Later in the book Job says to God, "You said listen and I would speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. *I had heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes.* I take back

everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance," (42:4-6). Job saw and tasted the Lord in a richer and fuller way because he put himself out there in his lamenting. When the Lord said he hates when we are indifferent (lukewarm) but prefers us to be hot or cold (Revelation 3:17) he wasn't kidding. We have a hard time imagining that God is humble enough to work in relationship with our fallenness as humans. He has already died for it. There is nothing about us He doesn't already know. When we trust it to Him he changes us. He is that big and kind and humble.



DAYMARK NEWS

Thank you all very much for your help, prayers and gifts as we muddle through the aftershocks of Dewayne's death. About 50% of the funds needed to support Dewayne's salary through September has already been contributed. If you have any desire to help cover the costs of that you can send a financial gift to Daymark and attach a note that says it is for Dewayne's salary. Please continue to pray for Cheryl, Dewayne's family and for Daymark (we have begun to move into the process of hiring another counselor and would covet your prayers in that area).

GORDON recently preached a sermon on forgiveness and marriage and if you would like some refreshment for you marriage you can listen to it at www.ompc.org. The sermon is entitled "Creating an Atmosphere Where Forgiveness Makes Sense" and was delivered on August 10, 2008.

GORDON is doing his seminar called Home Base: Growing a Life Giving Family on October 9-11 at Red Mountain Church. This seminar helps families integrate the gospel into family life. For more information on the seminar content go to www.daymarkcounseling.com and click the main Seminars tab on the home page. We would like to have the seminar professionally filmed and put on DVD for distribution. This will cost around \$1500. If you would like to help with this expense, please let us know.

JULIE is doing a seminar at Fullness Christian Fellowship in Birmingham on October 3rd, and a women's retreat in Mentone, Alabama November 7-8.

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